

NAMIBIA

MCC Learning from

“FINAL REPORT OF THE NAMIBIA ETOSHA NATIONAL PARK EVALUATION”

ABT ASSOCIATES, SEPTEMBER 2020

MCC has identified the following programmatic and evaluation lessons based on the Namibia Etosha National Park Final Evaluation Report.

PROGRAMMATIC LESSONS

- *Policy and institutional reform (PIR) requires careful planning and continuous buy-in from local stakeholders.* According to the evaluation report, a number of stakeholders reported that the change management process attempted at Etosha National Park (ENP) had unrealistic timelines, overly optimistic assumptions, and encountered resistance from the Ministry of Environment and Tourism (MET). This was an example of a PIR intervention that aimed to disrupt relationships, power dynamics and incentive structures at work within a particular context in order to usher in improved operations. Without local buy-in, such interventions have little chance of success. MCC should seek greater understanding of the PIR environment before and during an intervention and ensure continuous buy-in for recommended changes. The following sub-lessons help articulate this point and discuss specific solutions.
 - *Political economy analysis (PEA) can help stakeholders understand how change happens within a particular context and increase the potential to achieve short- and long-term change.* PEA can illuminate the roles and responsibilities of groups and individuals, along with the relationships and allocation of power between them, and the incentive structure for making or resisting change. PEA could have helped clarify the roles, relationships, power dynamics, and incentive structures of centrally-based MET staff, ENP-based MET staff, and the National Wildlife Refuge (NWR) representatives contracted to operate the park—all of these entities had a role in achieving change at ENP and would have required varying incentives and perhaps disincentives to bring about that change. The evaluation report noted that according to ENP staff and management, NWR does not always follow Park rules and operations could be improved by clarifying the roles and responsibilities of NWR and MET. One stakeholder also commented “[t]here was also a notable exclusion of NWR from assistance,” even though the change process demanded a lot from them. Better

engagement of NWR could have resulted in different outcomes. The actions that facilitate or hinder institutional change are by definition dynamic, so MCC and MCAs should continue to analyze the institutional environment and changing dynamics throughout the implementation process and adjust accordingly. The understanding derived from PEA can facilitate the adoption of more promising strategies for achieving results, help with securing partner country buy-in to the change process, and contribute to greater clarity about the timeline required to achieve desired changes and likely risks to success.

- *Problem Driven Iterative Adaptation (PDIA) is an approach that empowers local stakeholders to solve difficult policy problems and may have been more effective at improving ENP management.* A complement to a comprehensive PEA is PDIA, which helps local stakeholders take the lead in understanding problems, root causes, identifying entry points for making change, identifying and embarking on solutions, assessing the effectiveness of those solutions, and adapting for further change. MCC has been experimenting with PDIA in several countries and believes that empowering local stakeholders to gain deep understanding of the problems and underlying causes at play, testing incremental solutions, assessing regularly the outcomes of these solutions, and adapting as needed to attain a successful outcome may be a promising strategy for achieving change. Because the process is led by stakeholders who are embedded within the systems we are trying to improve, they will likely bring more local context to the process. The buy-in of local stakeholders leading on PDIA may also help stimulate the buy-in of a wider group of stakeholders, which is ultimately necessary for short- and longer-term success.
- *MCC should consider whether to require that the most difficult Conditions Precedent (CPs) to achieve be fulfilled prior to entry into force (EIF).* CPs that aim to establish a foundation for MCC investments and help increase the chances of sustainability are an important tool for MCC. A strong theme in the evaluation was that many of the Tourism CPs were achieved later than expected which caused implementation of the dependent investments to be rushed. In addition, several key CPs were ultimately met without substantive impact and the evaluation identified MET's capacity to meet the CPs as "a key weakness underlying the project." MCC country teams should consider whether really critical CPs should be met prior to EIF such that (1) they do not affect the five-year compact timeclock; (2) if such CPs require support to become operational once achieved "on paper," MCC can provide that support during program implementation; and (3) if meeting a CP suffers from a lack of political will, MCC can assess whether to continue planning to

implement an intervention before there is the overwhelming pressure to “just implement” that occurs after EIF.

- *MCC country teams and partner countries should consider how to maintain local stakeholder buy-in throughout the implementation period.* Even if a partner country undertakes significant reforms to lay a foundation prior to EIF, their commitment to continued change might vary once they have secured compact funding. MCC is considering how to use creative approaches to maintain partner country buy-in over time. For example, carefully-paced incentives can help to motivate desired change, like making additional MCC funding available once certain conditions have been met. The Namibia Compact attempted this with the condition precedent to adopt the “Galton Gate Plan” with key milestones that were required before the ENP infrastructure investment could be implemented but several of the changes under the Plan were superficial and came so late that they created challenges for completing the work that was dependent on them. Another strategy under consideration is to require copayment or even reimbursement by the partner country to demonstrate a financial commitment to the reforms. If desired change does not happen or is delayed as was the case at ENP, MCC must be willing to take the necessary action to bring about change, including possibly discontinuing certain contingent activities and withdrawing that funding from the compact.
- *MCC needs to assess the need for, capacity to manage, and incentives to embrace and maintain data systems it funds.* The evaluation report described challenges encountered with the availability and quality of tourism data needed for the evaluation. The lack of data hindered the evaluation but is even more problematic for improving ENP management. The Compact provided support data systems at ENP but according to the evaluation report, the effort to establish an equipment database was never operationalized and the electronic registration system introduced to streamline ENP management is no longer operational and no plans exist for bringing it back online. Unfortunately, MCC has encountered similar sustainability challenges with data systems supported in other compacts, which warrants careful consideration of why this frequently occurs. For example, to the extent data systems do not meet the needs perceived by our country partners, co-creating data solutions might better align the data systems with their perceived data needs rather than just MCC or an MCA’s perception of their data needs. By co-creating solutions to partner country data needs, MCC may be able to motivate increased buy-in for the development and use of these systems. Also, to the extent the sustainability challenges result from the inability to maintain compact-funded systems, MCC should ensure data systems (1) are fit for purpose

and no more sophisticated than necessary; (2) include in procurement documents that the systems should be maintainable with equipment and expertise that is locally or regionally available; and (3) require that partner countries begin budgeting for system maintenance during implementation rather than waiting until the post-compact period. Finally, to the extent sustainability challenges result from a lack of political will or prioritization, MCC should explore the incentives for embracing and maintaining data systems as a part of any PEA and aim to incentivize the adoption and use of data systems for evidence-based decision-making and improved operations; specific solutions should be tailored to the context but might include providing additional resources to entities that demonstrate their commitment to competent data use.

- *MCC should condition investments on comprehensive long-term maintenance plans and help minimize the costs and other logistics involved in performing maintenance.* The evaluation noted that several ENP staff members reported a lack of capacity and budget to perform maintenance on new infrastructure and equipment and the difficulty of obtaining spare parts for items procured abroad. MCC's procurement rules do not allow procurements to favor bidders from specific places; however, local maintenance considerations (e.g., access to requisite expertise and spare parts) can be incorporated into the bid evaluation criteria to promote sustainability in the maintenance of new infrastructure and equipment. The evaluation also highlighted that some sustainability concerns resulted from technical design not well suited to the environment. To help facilitate long-term maintenance plans and help mitigate the lack of dedicated budgets to perform maintenance, compacts should ensure designs are robust, fit for purpose, and minimize lifecycle costs.
- *If MCC supports organizations that generate their own revenue but do not control their own budgets, it should consider whether ring-fencing some revenue would protect against a resistance to decentralization or misalignment of incentives between the local and central levels.* According to the evaluation report, stakeholders reported that MET did not always make sufficient funds available for complete and timely repairs at ENP. This challenge speaks to the failure of the decentralization process that aimed to transfer some central level MET control to the local level and enable decisions to be made by local ENP staff to allow for faster and more efficient implementation of actions to manage the park. In other words, ring-fencing a portion of ENP's revenue to support its operations may have helped mitigate the failure of the decentralization process. It must be acknowledged that even if the compact had successfully ring-fenced some ENP revenue to spend based on local priorities, there is no guarantee such an arrangement would have survived a change in political direction. However, it might have been useful while it lasted and perhaps helped establish a precedent that would be harder to change later.